THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEWED BY 2 McKee A DATE 4/15
RPS[ ] or XPS[X] EXT. DATE
TS AUTH: REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS [ ]
DECLASSIFIED [X] RELEASABLE [X]
RELEASE DENIED [ ]
FA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

162

SCHOOL OF HISTORICAL STUDIES

December 22, 1950

Dear Carl:

When I saw you recently in Washington you mentioned the possibility of our consulting on the problems raised in connection with the Rowe-Ramspeck Report. It is of course a subject in which I have a deep interest both personally, as one who has spent a quarter of a century in the Foreign Service of the United States, and ex officio, in my recent capacity as President of the American Foreign Service Association. Since I do not know the status of the deliberations in the Department on the subject, I cannot speak to specific points which you may have under discussion. It is also not easy for me to come to Washington to see you. I thought for these reasons that the best thing I could do would be to put down on paper for you certain of my general views on the future of the Service, in the confidence that you will find little difficulty in applying them to any specific problems you may have before you.

I proceed, in thinking about these matters, from the assumption that we will always have to have some body of people engaged in the handling of our relationships with foreign countries, and that there are four main requirements which these people should satisfy. These are:-- (1) that they should have special and superior educational qualifications, for the simple reason that the apprehending of foreign realities places greater demands on the intellect than the apprehending of those with which we have been familiar since childhood; (2) that they should apply themselves to Foreign Service work long enough and consistently enough to acquire those benefits of experience with foreign living and foreign representation which are instinctive and subconscious rather than explicit, which cannot be stated in text books, and which are an important component of what we call "wisdom" in this field of activity; (3) that they should have superior qualities of individual character, which would enable them to bear themselves with dignity, and in a manner to command respect, in a foreign environment; and (4) that they should stand with respect to our Government in a completely disciplined relationship, which would make them effective and, where necessary, self-effacing servants of the national interest.

Now what is it that you require organizationally, to achieve these purposes?

For the first purpose, namely that of assuring a suitable level of intelligence and education, you obviously require a system of rigorous written and oral examinations, competently and impartially administered, entirely independent of ulterior pressures or influence.

For the second purpose, namely that of assuring requisite experience, you require a reasonable length and continuity of service abroad. A few

DECLASSIFIED

of discomfort

cursory and intermittent contacts with the foreign world are insufficient. An officer must remain in that world long enough to feel that he has really lived its life and met squarely whatever tests such residence brings, whether they be ones of danger, of loneliness, of boredom, or of luxury. Above all, and this is the most bitter reality of all, he must remain abroad long enough to see his own country with new eyes; for if he does not do this he will never fully understand what it is he is dealing with in trying to adjust the relationships between his own country and others.

For the third, you need careful attention to upbringing and personality in the selection of officers. I am not one of those who believe that gentlemen are produced in any particular geographic area or any limited circle of academic institutions in our country. But I firmly believe that there is such a thing as the American gentleman, that he is second to none in dignity and distinction of character, that he is not so scarce that we cannot recruit a Foreign Service from his ranks, and that we have no right to send anybody to represent us abroad who we do not feel belongs to this species of mankind. I have no patience with the theory that there is some special virtue in American mediocrity and that it is by our mediocrity that we should be known to foreign peoples. I see no reason in the world why the work of Foreign Service, as exacting and responsible a function as any that exists in our public life, should not be carried out by the finest people we have; and I see nothing shameful in admitting that in our society many people are finer than others. If this view be accepted, it is clear that you cannot admit people to Foreign Service work just on the basis of mechanical standards such as the possession of certain specialized "skills". Special knowledge and special skills are a great help to people. I say that as one who spent many years of his own life in specialized activity. But in Foreign Service they are of help only in so far as they enrich a character and an intelligence already containing the basic qualifications for Foreign Service work. I see here no escape from the necessity of careful and thoughtful human discretion in the selection of personnel by what they are as living beings, not by what they are as ciphers who have met certain business-machine tests. The sort of people we need can be selected only after some system of direct observation and examination by other people; and it is absolutely essential that those other people be, in their turn, not just technicians but people of great wisdom, experience and understanding: people who have themselves come along life's ladder the hard way and who have enough knowledge of the nature of Foreign Service to measure the raw material from which they must select against the ordeals to which it will be subjected if selected.

Finally, the question of discipline. It is a question of subjective attitude--the attitude of the officer toward the Government for which he works, but also the attitude of those people who speak for the home Government in their dealings with the officer. There must be here a relationship of mutual helpfulness and confidence. The Government must be able to feel that the officer can be depended upon to give complete obedience to direct orders and to remember at all times his status as an agent and representative of his country. For this, it is important that the officer himself not view his work as just "another job" or as a peg in some vast bureaucratic apparatus where all he has to worry about are his rights and privileges, but that he recognize in it its

DECLASSIFIED

unique importance and significance--a quality derived from the delicate status of the Foreign Service officer as the outpost between two worlds--which overrides all personal considerations in time of emergency. These things cannot be spelled out in orders or regulations; they are questions of feeling and instinct. Somehow, the Foreign Service officer must be prepared at any time, when the situation warrants, to view himself and his function in the way that the officer of the armed service regards himself and his function in time of war. It is my belief that this represents a specific feature of Foreign Service life which is not, cannot be, and need not be, matched in many other branches of Government service. A Foreign Service officer is the bearer of a special trust. If he makes a serious mistake he can embarrass, and bring discredit upon, the whole body politic of his country. His disciplinary relationship cannot, therefore, be blanketed in, and identified, with that of all the civil service of the United States. It is far closer to that of the officers of the armed services than to that of many members of the civilian services. Yet it cannot be stated explicitly in manuals and regulations; the forms and shapes it assumes in various contexts of time and place and circumstance are too evanescent, too subtly variable, to be susceptible of static and explicit definition. There is nothing worse than a regimented and militarized diplomacy.

The only way to achieve the requisite form of discipline, therefore, is by making Foreign Service a way of life and instilling among its devotees an esprit de corps which includes confidence in the Government for which they work, confidence in each other in all their relationships as colleagues in a profession, and confidence in themselves individually. Since you will not be able to give them the satisfaction of exceptional financial emolument or of public appreciation at home, you will have to allow them their rewards in the form of appreciation by their fellow officers and by their superiors for whatever service they are able to render. They will have to find their true value in the eyes of their confreres. But they will not believe in this evaluation, or derive from it the sense of appreciation they require, unless they feel that those who work with them and those who direct their work are people who are treading or have trodden the same path on which they find themselves--people who have met the same tests, and who know the bitterness of their difficulties and the flavor of their triumphs.

All that means, in my mind, a real career system, and no nonsense about it. If you want this sort of discipline and esprit de corps you cannot load up the ranks of your Service with a host of casual curiosity-seekers who think that it might be exciting to spend a year or two abroad providing that if it turns out to be inconvenient or unromantic you can always hurry back home and build yourself a little nest somewhere else in the denser and warmer thickets of bureaucracy. And I feel I should say at this point that you will also not get this sort of discipline if you continue to separate, as I realize legislation may force you to do, supervision of your officers in general matters from supervision of them in security matters. What madness this is to think that you can functionalize "security" as a sort of a technical service. A man's loyalty to his country is not a peripheral appendage to his personality or his usefulness as an officer. It is the most intimate core of his intellectual and moral nature. In these problems of security, which are so often ones of personal acquaintance, of loyalties to friends and family, of intellectual error and growth, and of the independence of the mind, the officer has--as in no other branch of his life or work--need for the wisest and surest, the most

delicate and understanding sort of guidance and solicitude from those who control his career. If he feels, as many do today, that these matters are in the hands of anonymous and unknown persons, who have no knowledge of him or of the life he leads, and of whose breadth of outlook and understanding he in turn can have no assurance, and with which he suspects that these people can damage his career and in many ways his personal life by a stroke of the pen without even being forced to confront him face to face with their charges, he must inevitably have a sense of helplessness, of being at the mercy of undependable, sinister forces which he cannot see and cannot influence:--a state of mind which constitutes the most dangerous possible strain on ~~psychic~~ emotional stability and represents a perpetual doubt, gnawing at the vitals of that spirit of confidence and buoyancy which a man needs to perform his best work.

Now I will say no more about the application of these principles to the problems I suspect you have before you. I am appealing here not for the sort of Service that has been, but for the sort of Service which could be, and which must be, if this country is to make the most of its position in the world. I am not animated by any nostalgia for what has been known in the past as the Foreign Service; for that which was good in it represented only beginnings, bravely undertaken but not widely understood, only half-heartedly pressed, and finally permitted to suffocate among a host of ulterior impulses. I regard effective American diplomacy as one of those things which cannot be said to have been tried and failed but can only be said to have never been tried. Feel, then, as you will about what we have known in the past as the Foreign Service; but do bear in mind that this is as near to a real turning point in Foreign Service affairs as any juncture we are likely to have in this strange business of Government which knows no really final beginnings or endings, and that your responsibility for the quality of American diplomacy ten or fifteen years hence is a very serious one indeed. Beside that responsibility a great many things should pale into insignificance, including both the sense of jealousy and irritation with which the old Service seemed to affect many people outside its ranks in Washington and throughout the country, and the sense of sadness and frustration which many of us have felt who have made Foreign Service work ~~out~~ lives and who have had glimpses at times--or thought we had--of what American diplomacy might be.

Very sincerely,

George Kennan

George Kennan

The Honorable Carlisle H. Humelsine
Department of State
Washington 25, D.C.